Civic Journalism

News as Transactional Pedagogy

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As is widely known, John Dewey's philosophy of education depicts humanity as an evolved product of and participant in nature. People are not Cartesian observers who learn best by reading text books and absorbing lectures. Thus, the "learner is a seeker after truth" who progresses "through active participation," not a "recipient of the truth" (Gruber, 1961, p. 172). This approach overrides any sharp philosophical separation of knowledge and action. Humans acquire knowledge by transacting within the world, not by mirroring nature from the outside looking in. The transaction concept (Dewey & Bentley, 1949) depicts knowers and the known as interdependent, separable only for analysis. Such an orientation suggests a need for a transactional pedagogy (Neilsen, 1989). With this, students do not just absorb lectures but learn to solve problems, often by working together. In this light, Deweyan education tries to prepare people for active involvement in democracy. Contrary to some views (e.g., Lippmann, 1922, 1925), people are not spectators whose proper role in public affairs is limited to casting an occasional ballot for one or another scoundrel.

If one applies such ideas to journalism, something akin to the civic or public journalism of the 1990s appears. In general, civic journalists try to take an active role in their communities and to encourage their fellow citizens to do the same. In contrast, conventional journalists often try to act as detached, objective spectators. Traditionalists may seek to report what happens in a way that does not involve values or reflect concerns for the good of any community.

Sirianni and Friedland (2001) summarized the present central idea of the rapidly evolving civic journalism movement.

> Journalists must assume responsibility for helping to constitute vital publics with the usable knowledge that enables them to deliberate about complex issues and to engage in common problem solving. Because journalists invariably narrate the story of our common life in their reporting of the facts, they should frame the news to enable people to see themselves as active citizens, rather than as mere spectators, victims, or

> consumers of information. While reporters should not compromise their objectivity through advocacy journalism, or by taking the lead in developing solutions to problems, they can play convening and catalytic roles that bring citizens together to deliberate among themselves and with those in positions of power, so that citizens may help fashion problem-solving strategies and policy responses. (pp. 186–187)

As such, civic journalism has commonalities with critical pedagogy. For example, it implicitly rejects the "banking concept of education" (Freire, 1970/2000, p. 72), in which teachers "pay in" knowledge to student "depositories." Like Dewey, it blurs the distinction between a teacher and student (i.e., journalist and audience). For example, a teacher and students may approach problems collectively. Contrary to Freire (1970/2000), though, it may not eliminate this distinction. Unlike some critical approaches, it has no specific political agenda, except the perhaps-liberal assumption that human involvement can improve the world (see J. P. Miller & Seller, 1985).

In this light, one might view a civic newspaper as a curriculum, involving transactions between journalists and audiences "designed to facilitate learning and development and to impose meaning on experience" (J. P. Miller & Seller, 1985, p. 3). "Teacher" and "students" may codetermine what to include and emphasize—i.e., what is news. Civic journalism emphasizes the transaction view of curricula but may include elements of traditional transmission and transformation curricula, as well (see J. P. Miller & Seller, 1985). That is to say, its goals focus on democratic problem solving as well as traditional learning and, perhaps at times, personal growth or social change.

Civic journalism and conventional journalism differ regarding the way they implicitly model communication. Extending some ideas found in Dewey (1916/1980), communication scholar James Carey (e.g., 1989) has articulated a ritual communication model. This contrasts with the usual transmission model. Both models have roots in traditional religion. A ritual model treats communication in participatory, sharing terms, akin to a religious ceremony. The transmission model implies that it is a tool to spread information and influence through time and space. Civic journalism involves ritual communication more than does traditional journalism. These models resemble the distinctions between transmission and transaction pedagogy and curricula (J. P. Miller & Seller, 1985; Neilsen, 1989). One should not treat such distinctions too dualistically, though. In fact, typical journalistic practices fall on a continuum between the two. Civic journalism philosophy nudges them somewhat in the direction of the ritual end of the scale.

Thus, civic journalism should not encourage journalists to abandon all they have done traditionally. Similarly, Neilsen (1989) advocates transaction pedagogy but retains a place for transmission. At civic news organizations, reporters still cover the school board and search for feature stories to fill news

holes on drizzly news days. Nonetheless, it is no accident that Merritt (1998) subtitled his book about the movement *Why Telling the News Is Not Enough*.

Modern civic journalism evidently first appeared in Columbus, Georgia, during the 1980s (see Rosen, 1992; Winn, 1993). There, *Ledger-Enquirer* editor Jack Swift attempted to rejuvenate the civic and political life of local citizens. Columbus, home to the U.S. Army's Fort Benning, had long suffered from a cultural and political backwardness that constrained its participation in Sunbelt prosperity. Locals distrusted their government, and most Blacks did not register to vote, for example. Without any evident influence from Dewey's philosophy, Swift abandoned the spectatorial pose of traditional journalism in favor of positioning his newspaper as a community participant. Most notably, Swift organized public meetings, which his paper then covered, for citizens. This obviously takes journalism beyond trying to mirror reality. Eventually, Knight-Ridder, which owns the Columbus paper, named Swift as its editor of the year. Yet, the experiment created much controversy among journalists at the paper. Some saw it as neglecting beat (e.g., police, schools) coverage and compromising objectivity. In time, the project died. Nonetheless, the idea caught on. Perhaps one-half of all U.S. dailies practiced civic journalism during the 1990s. Knight-Ridder papers have been most active. (For civic journalism case studies, see the Civic Practices Network [n.d.].)

Problems within both the newspaper industry and U.S. society contributed to the growth of civic journalism (see Rosen, 1996; Sirianni & Friedland, 2001). Daily newspapers had experienced decades of declining readership as voter participation in elections fell. Many remained in journalism for only a short time. The death of daily newspapers often had been predicted.

One notable example of civic journalism occurred in Wichita, Kansas. It began after the 1988 presidential election between George Bush and Michael Dukakis, with its images of Willie Horton and a Snoopy-like Dukakis in a military tank. *Wichita Eagle* editor Davis Merritt felt disgusted. He decided to change the paper's coverage of campaigns, avoiding a focus on horse race strategies. In the next governor's race, his paper targeted issues identified as important in survey research. Voter turnout improved, as did issue awareness among citizens. As New York University journalism professor Jay Rosen (1996) put it, "It was as if doctors, locked in a battle with lawyers about who was more responsible for soaring malpractice costs, suddenly turned to patients to understand anew their dissatisfaction with medical treatment" (p. 35).

A few years later, the newspaper started its "People Project," aimed at creating a nongovernmental participatory sphere. It began with lengthy interviews with local residents. These showed people's alienation from and frustration with public life. In collaboration with a radio and a television station, it attempted to help people deal with problems without involving government. This encompassed a series of articles, forums, and community events that focused on issues such as crime and gangs or inadequate schools. Efforts were made to connect

citizens among themselves and with volunteer organizations. Although schools did not clearly improve, citizen volunteering increased. Readers expressed more satisfaction with the paper.

In an especially controversial example, news organizations in North Carolina attempted to get candidates for governor and U.S. senator in 1996 to address issues of importance to the public. Of course, traditionally candidates and news organizations often choose the central campaign issues. In St. Louis, *Post-Dispatch* editor Cole Campbell encouraged journalists to concentrate on future possibilities for the city, not just present actualities. In doing so, an old Sunday issues section was transformed into one entitled "Imagine St. Louis." The section might focus one week on plans for a new bridge and in another on illiteracy. It attempted to engage citizens in local affairs.

Dewey has been the widely acknowledged pivotal intellectual influence for civic journalism. Nonetheless, others contributed via their effect on him. One is Charles Darwin. Another is George H. Mead, especially via his ideas about the social nature of the self and the symbolic nature of mind.

Previous discussions of civic journalism generally have ignored Darwin's influence. Yet, Darwin helped shatter the mind-as-mirror myth. Darwin's work encourages replacing it with notion of mentality as a biological instrument of adaptation. Thus, the mind emerges from and participates in nature; it does not observe. In turn, this may suggest the desirability of the participatory, rather than spectatorial, democracy that civic journalists promote. The traditional conception of mind, known as mind-body dualism, goes back to Plato and, especially, René Descartes (see C. W. Morris, 1932). The body occupies space. The mind does not; it thinks and observes. Linking this notion to the detachment and spectatorial pose of traditional journalism is not difficult. Akin to traditionalist notions of the mirroring mind, conventional journalism attempts to reproduce parts of reality objectively for ordinary people.

In emphasizing education, Dewey extended Darwinian theory. Of course, acquired physical features, such as a runner's leg muscles, cannot be inherited. Yet, education can pass on acquired cultural characteristics, for instance how to irrigate a desert (see Van Wesep, 1960). By promoting what Dewey saw as social intelligence, education (including civic journalism) may contribute to cultural development. At a bare minimum, journalists need to make necessary information resources available for community deliberations.

Such cultural evolution progresses as humans transact with their environment, each affecting the other. In this way, intelligence "lays a far greater role in human survival in an evolutionary world than Darwin allows" (Eames, 1977, p. 5). This contrasts with Darwinians such as Herbert Spencer (1873/1961), who saw human environments as largely fixed. Instead of mirroring, intelligence takes account "of the ways in which more effective and more profitable relations with these objects may be established in the future" (Dewey, 1925/1973, p. 54).

According to Dewey, as a civilization progresses, it will adapt its environment to itself, rather than merely accommodating itself to existing conditions. For example, people will irrigate a desert for agriculture. They will not merely habituate to an arid wasteland. Civic journalism might help a community deliberate, for example, whether the benefits of damming a river for agricultural irrigation outweigh the costs. The newspaper might run a week-long series on various aspects of the issue. It also might encourage and print reader opinions as well as sponsor and cover community meetings to discuss the issue. This might be needed especially prior to government reviews, which may require public hearings, or if existing review processes do not mandate these sufficiently.

Civic journalists often have cited Dewey's *The Public and Its Problems* (1927/1984). Other books of his, especially *Democracy and Education* (1916/1980), also have wide implications for civic journalism. Akin to ideas in Dewey's works, I view journalism largely as a form of continuing adult education and an important means of transmitting and socializing intelligence. Meaningful participatory democracy requires these.

In writing *The Public and Its Problems*, Dewey reacted to Walter Lippmann's (1922, 1925) pessimistic analyses of the prospects for democracy. Lippmann suggested that ordinary people possess neither the ability nor the inclination to govern themselves effectively. Instead, the masses can hold leaders accountable via the voting booth but generally should keep out of their way.

Dewey (1927/1984) admitted the accuracy of many of Lippmann's descriptions about U.S. democracy. Dewey argued, however, that these are not immutable. Instead, by employing the virtues of scientific communities, citizens might approach issues together and effectively govern themselves via consensus, he argued. In short, individualized or isolated minds might be incapable of dealing with modern problems, but the social whole may greatly exceed the parts. News organizations may help constitute this social whole, for instance by holding town meetings or creating sections that feature community discussion. They also may provide material for effective deliberation. As Dewey stated, "The essential need, in other words, is the improvement of the methods and conditions of debate, discussion and persuasion" (1927/1984, p. 365).

Ultimately, civic journalism may help existing communities function as quasi-scientific entities. Of course, to a Deweyan, one of the greatest shortcomings of today's schools is their failure to inculcate scientific attitudes. An important question is whether journalism can help remedy this. Of course, this scientific orientation consists of more than knowledge of formal research methods or particular theories. Rather:

> The virtues include a willingness to question, investigate and learn; a determination to search for clarity in discourse and evidence in argument. There is also a readiness to hear and respect the views of others, to consider alternatives thoroughly and impartially, and to communicate in a like manner in return. One is not irrevocably committed to antecedent

> convictions but is ready to qualify or change his views as a consequence of inquiry and communication. There is an urgency to persist in shared discourse in the direction of agreement. These virtues embrace novelty, innovation, growth, regard for the concerns of others, and scientific discipline. They reject the blind following of custom, authority, and impulse. (Gouinlock, 1995, p. 88)

Presumably, participation in civic journalism-related efforts can encourage people to so approach community issues. Ultimately, one goal of civic journalism is the creation of effective public opinion. The concept of public opinion has varied meanings (see Price, 1992). Of course, scholars usually use the term to refer to some sort of public judgment, ideally based on rational and informed deliberation and/or discussion (see Yankelovich, 1991). One form involves the pollster's amalgamation of individual views. On the other hand, public opinion may emerge from the communicative deliberations of those concerned about an issue (see Blumer, 1946; 1948). Such conceptions may depict concerned publics as akin to scientific communities. In this light, early-twentieth-century scholars such as Dewey viewed the individual self, including attitudes and opinions, as a social entity formed through communication and social action. Public opinion was likewise thought to be a product of interactive influences, formed with "the larger mind," shaped by—but by no means reducible to—the many individual expressions that enter public discussion (Price & Roberts, 1987, p. 782).

In turn, such public opinion may facilitate self-governance. Dewey's longtime friend Mead influenced many of Dewey's ideas, such as those about the social self. According to Mead's (1934) philosophy, the human mind consists of the ability to use significant symbols. These are gestures that all parties involved in an act of communication understand in much the same way. Speech exemplifies the significant symbol, although such things as hand gestures also may be significant. Thought is just a process of talking with oneself. The mind results from both biological evolution and culture, which supplies the symbols. A boy raised by wolves presumably would not have a mind. In turn, the mind makes possible the sense of a self. With it, humans can adopt the perspectives of others and perceive themselves as objects.

The self includes two interdependent components, the subject "I" and the object "me." The "I" is the individualistic, creative, and impulsive component, while the "me" represents the influence of society and its norms. "The 'I' is the response of the organism to the attitudes of the others; the 'me' is the organized set of attitudes of others which one himself assumes" (Mead, 1934, p. 175). A person exists not only as a citizen but also as one who reacts to a community and thereby changes it, in either minute or more substantial ways. The "me" is the predictable, orderly individual, while the "I" may represent novelty.

In this way, civic journalism projects may help people to contribute novel ideas to their communities, ideas that change people's lives and advance cultural evolution. For instance, in a forum a citizen may suggest where to construct the

dam to avoid burying potentially useful farmland. According to Mead (1936/1964b), "scientific method is, after all, only the evolutionary process grown self-conscious" (p. 23). In this light, the way people harvest and process grain requires "just as much evolution as the development of bacteriological laboratories in the digestive tract of an ox" (p. 41). That the mind and self are inherently social in origin suggests that effective public opinion may arise only from multiple minds. For instance, deciding whether or where best to build a dam may require considering and combining ideas from engineers, environmentalists, farmers, recreational fishermen, ordinary citizens, politicians, etc. A newspaper may participate by interpreting news, editorializing, and stimulating or providing a forum for discussion.

Nonetheless, serious barriers exist to acceptance of civic journalism among journalists. To some, it compromises traditional journalistic autonomy (see Merrill, Gade, & Blevens, 2001). Presumably, encouraging citizens to codetermine news compromises the professionalism of journalists who know what news is. Intense public interest in a proposed dam may encounter skepticism among journalists. The latter may see the issue as tangential to typical news concerning crime, taxes, etc. Resolving the issue of how to pursue civic journalism and yet retain journalistic autonomy (McDevitt, 2002) may determine the future of the movement.

An answer to the autonomy issue may lie with certain of Dewey's educational ideas, along with the introduction of a form of academic freedom into the newsroom. Education is "that reconstruction or reorganization of experience which adds to the meaning of experience, and which increases ability to direct the course of subsequent experience" (Dewey, 1916/1980, p. 82). In turn, experience "refers to a pattern of events in which the organism is deliberately or with some awareness attending or acting upon something and undergoing or suffering the consequences of the action" (Hook, 1990, p. 83). Education involves continuous experiential reconstructions, Dewey (1916/1980) wrote. The most notable distinction between living things and others is that the living "maintain themselves by renewal" (Dewey, 1916/1980, p. 4). In addition, "It is the very nature of life to strive to continue in being. Since this continuance can be secured only by constant renewals, life is a self-renewing process. What nutrition and reproduction are to physiological life, education is to social life" (p. 12). This point applies to the reconstruction of communities (see Campbell, 1992) via such things as civic journalism efforts and ongoing debate and discussion about dams.

A bit of a parallel perhaps exists here between issues of journalistic autonomy and the old controversy about the extent to which primary school teachers should emphasize the curriculum or a child's interests (see Phillips, 1998). In short, should instruction center on the child or on the subject? For Dewey, such issues involved a false dualism. Both "are interrelated or form a continuum rather than being distinct and opposing" (Phillips, 1998, p. 405). The goal of a teacher is to start with a child's interests and guide subsequent growth with re-

gard to curriculum. Of course, the interests of adults who read newspapers will exhibit more maturity than will those of a young child. Nonetheless, the role of a civic journalist may at times involve harmonizing his or her presentation of the results of autonomous inquiry with citizen interests. In journalism, my ideal seems similar to a proposal by McDevitt (2002). Civic journalism encourages "the independence to transcend conventional practices that would otherwise limit the contribution of the press to democratic life" (p. 154). Thus, autonomous journalists can convene and cover public discussion and debate about the issue.

Ultimately, academic freedom may be needed to help ensure that journalists work for the public, rather than for powerful interests in society or for those who provide their paychecks. Traditionally, First Amendment considerations have protected journalistic inquiry from government. They provide no protection from interference by advertisers and publishers, however. Powerful interests may want to push a dam through without considering the fears of ordinary people, for example. These interests may encourage a newspaper to avoid too much focus on the issue. Here, it is assumed that Dewey's (1938) concept of inquiry characterizes the work of journalists as well as scientists. Dewey saw inquiry as a transactional process of determining an indeterminate situation.

Of course, academic freedom refers in part to the rights of professionally qualified teachers and researchers to inquire, draw conclusions, and present their results without fear of sanction. One need not fear loss of employment, for example, for expressing honestly held but heretical conclusions. In an academic setting, students also enjoy academic freedom, but not the related job security. Academic freedom has a communitarian as well as an individualist component. It protects both academic communities, for instance from outside interference, and individual inquirers. Thus, it shields a university faculty from attempts to legislate the teaching of so-called scientific creationism, for instance.

Academic freedom may have a Deweyan component. By helping to found the American Association of University Professors, Dewey led successful efforts to establish academic freedom in education. His idea of freedom combined prior notions of freedom as choice, power, or reason (Damico, 1978). Thus, "freedom resides in the development of preferences into intelligent choices" (Dewey, 1928/1976, p. 202). Dewey rejected traditional free will. "The freedom necessary to make intelligent decisions is not a metaphysical freedom of the will, but a matter of knowledge" (D. Morris, 1996, p. 18). Dewey espoused effective freedom, "the opportunity to make the best of oneself by fully realizing one's capacities" (Westbrook, 1991, p. 165). This goes beyond negative freedom, the removal of external constraint. In particular, a lifting of legal restriction will not protect adequately the creation of knowledge. To Dewey (1927/1984), "a thing is fully known only when it is published, shared, socially accessible" (p. 345).

The negative freedom in the First Amendment helps protect journalists from legal constraint. A system of academic freedom primarily may enhance

journalists' rights of presentation and their effective freedom. If extended into the newsroom, it might place control of news decisions more formally in the hands of journalists, rather than of publishers. Concerning the journalistic dissemination of facts about society, Dewey (1927/1984) wrote, "The freeing of the artist in literary presentation . . . is as much a precondition of the desirable creation of adequate opinion on public matters as is the freeing of social inquiry" (p. 349).

Like the version found in academic settings, journalistic academic freedom would have both individual and community components. The situation might resemble a professor trying to publish a journal. As long as a reporter's work meets standards of professional competence, as judged by editors and perhaps by other peers, it would have guaranteed access to news pages. Obviously, any tendency for newspapers to print "all the news that fits," filling space left over after advertising is inserted, might require modification. News organizations also would have to ensure that journalists receive the needed resources to do their jobs.

Of course, ensuring academic freedom may require a formal system of job tenure. Perhaps future news organizations could borrow aspects of existing tenure arrangements in education. This may seem rather radical, but private businesses often grant a kind of informal tenure. They are less likely to dismiss employees with seniority. In any case, norms of journalistic tenure would have to evolve—existing models might not fit the profession especially well. That the academic freedom and tenure systems in higher education came with such things as the abandonment of advocacy research and the ideals of objectivity need not render them inapplicable with civic journalism. Civic journalism no more involves crusading than does classroom teaching. In each case, an educator needs to present varied sides to an issue and can, in appropriate ways, express his or her opinions. Surely, professional journalists require tenure as much as do school bus drivers in my state. Beyond this, pragmatist philosophy suggests a sophisticated form of objectivity that meshes neatly with civic journalism.

Traditional notions of journalistic objectivity typically presume the possibility of what D. Miller (1973) termed an absolute perspective. "Throughout history men have attempted to enter into an absolute perspective, the perspective of God, in order to 'see things as they are,' with the hope of getting rid of all bias and subjective interpretation" (p. 22). In journalism, this tendency has contributed to attempts at detachment and to separate facts from values.

Few journalists, however, likely are so detached that they care not whether the world ends tomorrow. Civic journalists (e.g., Merritt, 1998) typically argue that all journalistic practice involves values. For example, choosing to cover a topic implicates values. In addition, the pragmatists insist on the potential fallibility of all belief. Given this, concluding that available evidence warrants reporting something as a fact depends upon values. A reporter might attempt to find a Golden Mean between a reckless disregard for facts and such extreme caution

that no story ever appears, for instance. Given the value-laden nature of news, why not employ values that "this should be a better community; that its problems should be solved; that public life should go well?" (Merritt, 1998, p. 11).

A Deweyan and Meadian philosophical position, objective relativism (Lewis & Smith, 1980; Murphy, 1927) describes objectivity as value laden. Objective relativism attempts

> to unite two propositions which have uniformly been taken to be incompatible. (a) The objective facts of the world of nature and of reality are the very "apparent" and relative happenings directly disclosed to us in perception. (b) In spite (or because) of such objectivity such happenings remain ultimately and inescapably relative. (Murphy, 1927, p. 122)

It followed in part from relativity theory in physics. In effect, objectivity comes not from detachment, but from intersubjective or communal human transaction with the world. Many critics of civic journalism appear baffled by the notion that one can remain attached, for instance to a community, and yet remain objective. They (e.g., Merrill, Gade, & Blevens, 2001) equate objectivity with detachment.

To Mead (1927/1964a), objectivity exists not within sensory data, but within a perspective. This would apply both to science and to journalism. A perspective refers to an interrelated group of objects, such as grass, oxen, and humans. It involves the relation of the world to an individual and vice versa. For example, grass is a different object to oxen and to humans. "If an animal that can digest grass, such as an ox, comes into the world, then grass becomes food. . . . The advent of the ox brings in a new object" (Mead, 1934, p. 129). In one sense, a dam may consist of atomic particles swirling in space. To typical human perspectives, though, it is a tool that may function either well or badly. Individual community members may propose perspectives predicting either outcome.

D. Miller (1973) summarized this aspect of Mead's philosophy:

> Perspectives or determinations of the order of the passage of events are possible only because acting, selecting, organisms can, in their present behavior, take into account selected incoming stimuli and objects. By the use of significant symbols individual members of society can propose new perspectives that are sharable by other members of society, and the test of the objectivity of each perspective is found in its application in a social act. Emergence, the act of adjustment, sociality, and creativity are all involved in every perspective proposed by an individual. (p. 217)

Here, an important distinction arises between what Mead often called the world that is there and the environment. The world that is there refers to objects as they exist outside of perception or perspective. An environment exists with reference to living beings. "That is to say, as the organism enters into transaction with this world, as the world that is *there* is transformed into an environment, certain

objective properties arise" (Tibbetts, 1973, p. 31, italics original). Both news and objectivity concern the environment (i.e., the dam), not the world that is there.

In effect, calling something objective is a shorthand way of asserting that it operates within a communal, intersubjective perspective. This permits "its members to anticipate and communicate the experiential content associated with it and the other objects to which it is related within the perspective" (Lewis & Smith, 1980, p. 132).

Thus, journalism could attain objectivity in various senses without becoming detached. First, reporters, and their readers, operating from the same perspective, including but not limited to such things as membership in the same language community, can agree upon many "facts." An example might be a quote attributed to a source about the desirability of a dam. Of course, even here, consensually validated values will help reporters decide if the evidence merits calling something a fact. Weighing on this might be a journalist's notes, his or her recollection of the source's statements, and so forth. Consistent with this, Mead's relativism contains no enforced separation of facts and values. Instead, values are objectively relative facts. As C. W. Morris (1934) put it, value does not exist exclusively in the object or in the subjective mind of a person.

Thus, a person's ideas meant to help the community adapt or reconstruct itself may become intersubjectively objective if members of the community find them valuable in dealing with problems. If so, a modified "me" may form as the community changes. For example, a citizen suggestion about locating the dam may satisfy the otherwise competing interests of environmentalists, prospective farmers, and others. Here, journalists may attain objectivity either by formulating or communicating such ideas.

Applied to the press, this could encourage the individual reporter to play the role of a type of social commentator or even critic, as well as that of a chronicler of facts. Such criticism, however, must involve both the "I" and the "me" to be effective (Campbell, 1995). "Effective social critics, in other words, are individuals firmly rooted in the life of their community who see there problems and possibilities of resolution and who try to bring this perspective before the public" (p. 62). For example, as "participant-observers" of community life, journalists need not hesitate to offer suggestions for civic improvements in whatever form may be appropriate—commentary columns, talks before civic groups, oral discussions with community leaders, etc.—within a community.

Obviously, here lies a suggestion for an additional role of journalism within participatory democracy. Journalists should, as civic journalist sometimes do, go out of their way to feature the ideas of ordinary citizens, as well as of experts. Of course, they have no a priori way of knowing who will make fertile suggestions for social evolution.

Consistent with its Darwinian roots, the civic journalism movement is evolving, in some cases quite rapidly. A short time ago, some wondered if civic journalism was not a fad that has run its course (see Gibbs, 2003). Lately, a new

variant known as participatory journalism has appeared, in response to the rapid evolution in communication technology. Civic journalism may change so as to encompass it (see Witt, 2004). Although much discussion continues about a possible definition of participatory journalism, its referents typically include mainstream news media staff web logs containing reader comments, newspaper forums, reports and photos contributed by readers, and independent web news sites or news blogs (Lasica, August 2003). For example, the *New York Times* readers' opinions website section contains tens of thousands of email messages from readers, organized into forums concerning such things as Washington politics and television.

In this light, an important question is whether evolving technology enhances or diminishes citizen participation in community life. Despite the optimism of those (e.g., Witt, 2004) who hail these trends, a dose of skepticism seems warranted. Political scientist Robert Putnam (2000) has linked entertainment television and related electronic media to late-twentieth-century declines in civic engagement among U.S. citizens. He also reports that people who rely on the Internet for news tend to display less civic involvement than do others. More speculatively, civic-journalist Davis Merritt (1998) discussed "Harold the Rutabaga Man." Harold is a future social mutant who spends his time in on-line discussions with the few others around the world who share his rutabaga obsession. Obviously, Harold raises the possibility of future human communities that exist only on-line, among those sharing narrow interests. Such people's concerns with traditional community issues may never develop. The ultimate question may involve whether quirky virtual communities will displace the physical ones within which actual problems still arise. To date, the available evidence linking Internet use to traditional civic engagement, or the lack thereof, seems quite mixed (Katz & Aspden, 1997; Kraut et al., 1998; Putnam, 2000).

In any case, despite their merits, it seems clear that such things as participatory web logs and reader forums will not fully address the problems with democracy that Dewey (1927/1984) saw. Existing forums in *The New York Times*, for example, often involve special interest concerns such as travel and sports, rather than general issues pertaining to geographical communities, say in the New York City area. One often finds a similar focus on forums in local newspapers, which may focus on such topics as hometown sports.

To Dewey, the so-called Great Community of which he dreamed can never replace local ones. Beyond this, he also believed that face-to-face interaction is important. The written word involves the spectatorial eye and conversation the participatory ear, he (1927/1984) wrote. Ultimately, "We lie, as Emerson said, in the lap of an immense intelligence. But that intelligence is dormant and its communications are broken, inarticulate and faint until it possess the local community as its medium" (p. 372).

In addition, possible forms of civic journalism may not easily occur under the present system of advertising-supported and mostly chain-owned news-

papers. Certain tendencies in news and other media may be especially unhelpful. For example, the blurring of news and entertainment evident in today's corporate-dominated news may hinder scientific approaches to community problems. According to one pragmatic naturalist philosopher, "The emergence of a global mediocracy today poses a special threat to the scientific-rationalist outlook that has had such a powerful effect on civilization since the Enlightenment" (Kurtz, 2001, p. 211). Media contents that focus on paranormal phenomena and UFOs may be especially to blame, for example. People who are accustomed to entertaining news may not react well to serious civic journalism. Thus, the function of much news becomes less that of community service and more a matter of simply delivering audiences to advertisers at the lowest possible cost.

Merrill, Gade, and Blevens (2001) suggested that civic journalists might someday rely on community support, such as no-strings-attached donations from foundations, rather than advertising. As more Wal-Marts and Supercenters, which do relatively little newspaper advertising, drive traditional advertisers out of business, alternate financing may be necessary, in any case (see Fitzgerald, 2002).

This suggests some unconventional ideas. Perhaps one day publicly supported news organizations may become a norm. Actually, in Europe a variety of state subsidies of news organizations have occurred (see Picard, 1985). Possibly property or other taxes will support future U.S. news media. Were this to occur, news organizations might operate with more autonomy than at present because they would no longer fear loss of advertising. Along with public funding, though, might come demands that an equivalent to an institutional review board (IRB) approve the ethics of planned journalistic work. IRBs at universities and institutions such as hospitals approve the ethics of formal planned research that uses human subjects. With public funding, dominant journalistic perspectives might change. For example, this might help to reincarnate traditional muckraking, which often focused on corruption in the private sector, rather than just in the public sector. Tenure and academic freedom may prevent public-sector editorial cooptation or corruption. Beyond all this, news blogs increasingly may represent alternatives to overly commercialized news operations.

All this has implications for the way journalists are educated. Today, many students study journalism within academic units with curricula linked to the structures of existing mass media. For example, a close relationship may occur between education for journalism and for advertising. In the future, journalism education might more logically occur within schools of education.

My focus has been on Darwin, Dewey, and Mead, but the work of numerous other scholars has implications for the civic journalism movement. One example is Jürgen Habermas (e.g., 1981/1984), whose concepts of the public sphere and ideal speech situation refer to a participatory democratic institution independent of both government and business. This would give ordinary people a kind of tenure-like protection and would try thereby to remove all constraint on

inquiry. Perhaps most significant, though, is G. W. F. Hegel as an influence on the civic journalism movement. Of course, it is from Hegel that Dewey first drew inspiration and his lifelong antipathy to dualisms such as mind and body or the individual and society.

Assuming that knowledge, such as that presented in this article, exists largely for purposes of action, how can citizens, newspaper readers, and scholars promote civic participation? Much is possible, even if Dewey's problem of the public continues largely unsolved. Subject to previously mentioned caveats, modern technology creates many possibilities. If local news organizations shun participatory journalism or allow economic interests to dictate the news, citizens can bypass traditional news gatekeepers. For example, one paper I know of provided little coverage of controversial issues concerning a local university. This neglect perhaps resulted from the centrality of the university to the town's economy. Instead of serious news, the paper sometimes printed stories about such things as the marketing of bobble head dolls depicting a football coach. Partly in response, a faculty group website featured aggressive commentary and satire concerning both the campus and the newspaper. Possibly as a result, the newspaper upgraded its coverage. Adding a news blog to the faculty website would have created an even more participatory orientation.

In addition, citizens could organize participatory community forums and encourage local news operations to cover these. Beyond this, faculty in journalism and education might focus classroom time on principles and practices of participatory democracy. These could include lecture and practice concerning topics such as how to minimize constraints on honest expression in group settings.

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